

At times there is a very fine line separating the poems we call Psalms from the biblical literature we call Wisdom such as in the Book of Proverbs. Psalm 49 is a classic example of a definite blurring of that fine line. In fact, Psalm 49 sounds sufficiently like any number of passages in Proverbs that it basically counts as Wisdom Literature in its own right. The wisdom, or spiritual advice of the psalm is pretty straightforward. It can be summed up in classic sayings of, "You can't take it with you!" and "you cannot use your money to buy your way out of death."

But it's not as simple as just hearing the psalm as celebrating the poor and castigating the rich. What do you hear the psalm saying about happiness and satisfaction, trust and self-reliance?

SHEOL: שְׁאוֹל [sheol] - underworld (place to which people descend at death) Ps 49:14

iniquity אָוֹן [avon] :iniquity, guilt, punishment for iniquity

the foolhardy: כֶּסֶל [kesel]: loins, thighs, stupidity, confidence, foolishness as in trusting in your own loins [center of sexual and physical power].

ransom: כֹּפֶר [kopher] - the price of a life, ransom, bribe, pitch, Ps 49:7
2 in the ritual of פְּדוּת כֹּפֶר Exodus 30:12 is a half shekel of the sanctuary paid by each male above twenty years at the census in order that there might be no plague upon them. It was offered to Yahweh, עַל לְכַמֵּר to atone for them.

GRAVE: שַׁחַת [shachath] the pit, decay, corruption... destruction (1), dungeon (1), hole (1), pit (18), undergo decay (2).

become rich: אָשַׁר [ashar] - become rich, make rich, wax rich. A primitive root; properly, to accumulate; chiefly (specifically) to grow (causatively, make) rich -- be(-come, en-, make, make self, wax) rich, make (1 Kings 22:48 marg). Ps 49:16

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Psalm 49

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

- ¹ Hear this,
all you peoples;
give ear,
all inhabitants of the world,
 - ² both low and high,
rich and poor together.
 - ³ My mouth shall speak wisdom;
the meditation of my heart shall be understanding.
 - ⁴ I will incline my ear to a proverb;
I will solve my riddle to the music of the harp.
 - ⁵ Why should I fear in times of trouble,
when the *iniquity* of my persecutors surrounds me,
 - ⁶ those who trust in their wealth
and boast of the abundance of their riches?
 - ⁷ Truly, no *ransom* avails for one's life,
there is no price one can give to God for it.
 - ⁸ For the *ransom* of life is costly,
and can never suffice
 - ⁹ that one should live on forever and never see the GRAVE.
 - ¹⁰ When we look at the wise, they die;
fool and dolt perish together
and leave their wealth to others.
 - ¹¹ Their graves are their homes forever,
their dwelling places to all generations,
though they named lands their own.
 - ¹² Mortals cannot abide in their pomp;
they are like the animals that perish.
 - ¹³ Such is the fate of *the foolhardy*,
the end of those who are pleased with their lot.
- Selah*
- ¹⁴ Like sheep they are appointed for **SHEOL**;
Death shall be their shepherd;
straight to the grave they descend,
and their form shall waste away;
SHEOL shall be their home.
 - ¹⁵ But God will ransom my soul from the power of **SHEOL**,
for he will receive me.
- Selah*
- ¹⁶ Do not be afraid when some *become rich*,
when the *wealth* of their houses increases.

¹⁷For when they die
they will carry nothing away;
their **wealth** will not go down after them.
¹⁸Though in their lifetime they count
themselves happy—for you are praised
when you do well for yourself—
¹⁹they will go to the company of their
ancestors, who will never again see the
light.
²⁰Mortals cannot abide in their **pomp**;
they are like the animals that perish.

Luke 12:13-21

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹³Someone in the crowd said to [Jesus]
“Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family
inheritance with me.” ¹⁴ But [Jesus] said to
him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or
arbitrator over you?” ¹⁵ And he said to them,
“Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds
of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the
abundance of possessions.” ¹⁶ Then he told
them a parable: “The land of a rich man
produced abundantly. ¹⁷ And he thought to
himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place
to store my crops?’ ¹⁸ Then [the rich man]
said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns
and build larger ones, and there I will store all
my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my
soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for
many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ ²⁰ But
God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night
your life is being demanded of you. And the
things you have prepared, whose will they
be?’ ²¹ So it is with those who store up
treasures for themselves but are not rich
toward God.”

QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- What word, phrase or image grabs your attention?
- What is the psalmist saying about wealth and poverty, about happiness and satisfaction?
- How do the word of this story touch - your life and our life as the church today?

Selah: סֶלָה [selah]: to lift up, exalt. Selah is defined as a Hebrew word that has been found at the ending of verses in Psalms and has been interpreted as an instruction calling for a break in the singing of the Psalm or it may mean "forever."

wealth: כְּבוֹד [kabowd]: abundance, dignity, honor, glory (of external condition and circumstances), riches.

pomp יָקָר [yeqar]: preciousness, price, honor, pomp. From yaqar; value, i.e. (concretely) wealth; abstractly, costliness, dignity -- honor, precious (things), price.

LUKE : The author’s name does not appear in the book, but much unmistakable evidence points to Luke. This Gospel is a companion volume to the book of Acts, and the language and structure of these two books indicate that both were written by the same person. They are addressed to the same individual, Theophilus, and the second volume refers to the first (Ac 1:1).

Luke was probably a Gentile by birth, well educated in Greek culture, a physician by profession, a companion of Paul at various times from his second missionary journey to his final imprisonment in Rome, and a loyal friend who remained with the apostle after others had deserted him (2Ti 4:11). Luke says that he composed the story of Jesus and the Church based upon the gathered testimony of eye-witnesses.

This parable comes in the 12th chapter following warnings spoken by Jesus in regards to putting all of one’s trust in the teachings of religious leaders as opposed to the nature and living word of God. It’s immediately proceeded by the first public confession by the disciples of Jesus as the Messiah: the promised prophet-leader-king of God come to free all people.

Treasures: θησαυρίζω [thésaurizó]: to put away, "store up"; lay aside treasure, built up (accumulated) for the day of future recompense. It can refuse to both physical and figurative treasures from riches to thoughts stored up in the heart and mind. The word is the root the English term "thesaurus" which refers to a "storehouse (treasure) of synonyms." Literally "a receptacle for valuables".